From: Elizabeth Morra
To: Christy Agner
Subject: Weekly Federal Recap for January 30, 2026
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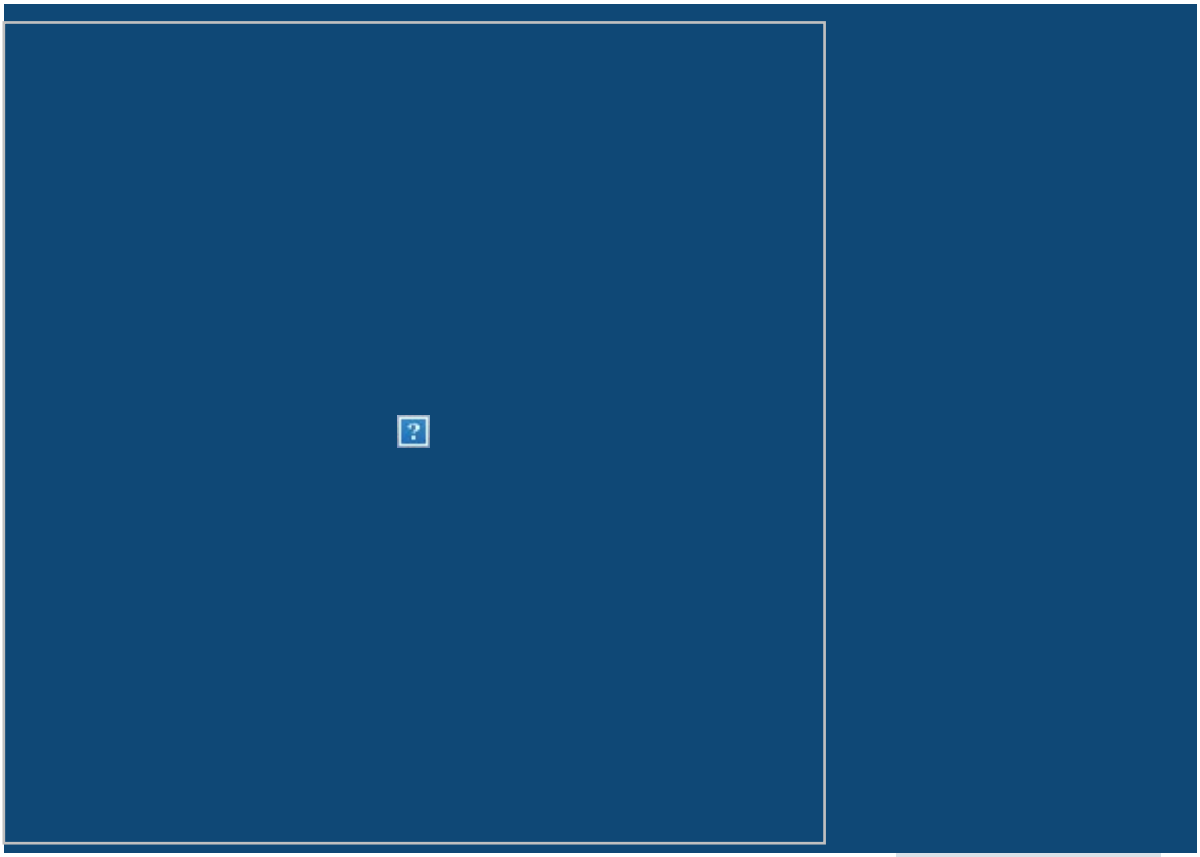

January 30, 2026

Weekly Federal Recap

A weekly update on federal legislative topics impacting higher education.

Senate Trying to Pass Appropriations Minibus Sans DHS Funding; Partial Government Shutdown Over Weekend Likely

- President Donald Trump and Senate Democrats reached an agreement last night to fund the federal government as a deadline for a partial shutdown approaches.
- The deal would strip full-year funding for the Homeland Security appropriations bill (DHS) from the six-bill appropriations minibus, which passed the House last week, and place it under a two-week continuing resolution (CR) to buy time for concerns about ICE policy and funding to be negotiated.
- The Senate would then be able to pass the five-bill minibus, which makes up about 95% of federal funding and includes: Defense, LHHS-Education, Transportation-HUD, State-Foreign Operations, and Financial Services appropriations bills.
- But the Senate's hopes of quickly passing the deal, text of which is yet to be

unveiled, ran into a snag last night, with leadership sending senators home around 11 p.m. Senators are still trying to pass the deal today.
- Senate Majority leader John Thune (R-SD) said there were unresolved issues on both sides of the aisle. But the main sticking point appears to be Sen. Lindsey Graham's decision to block a quick vote on the deal because it includes a House-passed provision undoing a law that allows senators to receive cash payouts if they had their phone records seized by DOJ.
- Even if the Senate passes the deal today, a partial government shutdown could still happen early Saturday morning (12:01 am), since the House is in recess and not scheduled to return until Monday.
- Stripping the full-year DHS bill out of the larger six-bill package is a victory for Senate Democrats, who are unified behind demands for enforcement policy changes after federal agents deployed to Minnesota fatally shot 37-year-old Alex Pretti last week.
- But Democratic leaders are still in negotiations with the White House over exactly what policy changes they want signed into law in return for their support for a long-term bill.
- Though Republicans have signaled they are open to some of the ideas Democrats have proposed, including requiring independent investigations, some in the GOP are raising warning flags about a fight to come.
- If the package isn't enacted before the Friday night deadline, a shutdown will hit all federal agencies that weren't covered in the six funding bills Congress already enacted for the current fiscal year.

Department of Education Publishes Rulemaking Setting New Limits on Students Loans and Creating New Definitions for Graduate and Professional Students (Courtesy Politico and APLU)

- The Education Department (ED) released a draft proposed rule this week on how it would implement the overhaul of the student loan program as mandated in Republicans' sweeping domestic policy law, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA).
- The draft rule was printed in today's Federal Register: https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2026-01-30/pdf/2026-01912.pdf.
- The rule resulting from the Reimaging and Improving Student Education (RISE) consensus agreement outlines how the department would eliminate GRAD PLUS loans, defines professional and graduate programs, sets loan caps for these programs and implements two new repayment plans — efforts the department says will help drive down the cost of tuition.
- "For years, American families have rightfully been concerned about the escalating cost of higher education, the long-term — and often negative — effects of student loan debt, and how their postsecondary education translates into real-world jobs and higher wages," Education Undersecretary Nicholas Kent said in a statement.
- But the definitions for graduate and professional students received a pushback from the higher education community, health care sector and nurses in particular.
- There is also a Republican-led bill filed to change the definition.
- The proposed rule will have a 30-day comment period, which ends March 2.
- APLU developed a summary memo outlining the consensus language in November following the conclusion of the committee's negotiations.

AHEAD Consensus Agreement Also Expected (Courtesy APLU)

- Department of Education rulemakings resulting from the Accountability in Higher Education and Access through Demand-Driven Workforce Pell (AHEAD) consensus agreement are also expected in the next few weeks.

The AHEAD consensus language covers the Workforce Pell Grant program, as well as new accountability standards.
- APLU published summary memos of ED's recently concluded negotiated rulemaking committees. The first memo covers the consensus language reached on packaging Pell grants and the Workforce Pell Grant program.
- The second memo covers the consensus language reached on the law's accountability framework.

Education Department Launches New Rulemaking Session on Accreditation (Courtesy Politico)

- The Education Department is seeking negotiators to serve on its latest rulemaking committee that's expected to amend regulations regarding the college oversight system.
- The department is creating the Accreditation, Innovation, and Modernization, or AIM, Committee and is seeking nominations to serve on the negotiating committee.
- The committee is set to focus on areas that largely echo President Donald Trump's April executive order, which called to make it easier for new college accreditors to gain recognition and rollback diversity, equity and inclusion standards.
- "Rather than focusing on whether member institutions offer high-quality programs that benefit students and the workforce, the current accreditation regime has become a protectionist system that shields existing players, fuels rising costs, drives credential inflation, adds administrative bloat, allows undue influence from related trade associations, and promotes ideologically driven initiatives," Undersecretary Nicholas Kent said in a statement.
- **Mark your calendars:** The committee will meet in person for two sessions on April 13-17 and May 18-22.

GOP Senators Investigate Education Funding Fraud (Courtesy Politico)

- Senate HELP Committee Chair Bill Cassidy (R-La.) said earlier this week a new task force will tackle fraud in the spending of federal funds, including on education programs.
- Sen. Jon Husted (R-Ohio) and Sen. Tommy Tuberville (R-Ala.) will run point on the Education subcommittee.
- "Americans want the next generation to have the knowledge and skills to succeed and when they invest in education, they should be confident those dollars are accomplishing just that," Husted said in a statement.
- Cassidy and panel Republicans pointed to investigations during Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz's tenure as a prime motivation for the committee.
- Walz has been scrutinized for a lack of oversight of the state's social service grantees.
- The most recent report from the Government Accountability Office stated that the federal government loses between $233 billion and $521 billion annually to fraud.
- The Trump administration has primed its own efforts into preventing fraud after the Education Department found that nearly $90 million in federal student aid was fraudulently disbursed last year. The loss of funds was linked to AI bots disguised as students and missed corrections over now deceased students, according to the department.

APLU Provides Input on NSF's FY26-2030 Strategic Plan

- APLU submitted feedback on the U.S. National Science Foundation's (NSF) draft FY26-2030 Strategic Plan, which describes the agency's vision for advancing

American excellence and national security through investments in research, empowering STEM talent, optimizing NSF's capabilities, and modernizing NSF operations. APLU responded via an NSF web form set up to manage replies, which replaces a traditional letter format. The association published its submissions as a PDF to share with the APLU community.

Upcoming Events of Interest

2/04/26 10:15 AM EST
Hearing: House Education and Workforce Committee
The House Education and the Workforce Higher Education and Workforce Development Subcommittee holds a hearing on "Runaway College Spending Meets the Working Families Tax Cuts."

2/04/26 2:00 PM EST
Hearing: House Veterans' Affairs Committee
The House Veterans' Affairs Technology Modernization Subcommittee holds a hearing on "Digital G.I. Bill Undelivered: Contracting Challenges and the Need for Acquisition Reform."

2/05/26 12:00 EST
NIFA Listening Session
The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA) will hold a virtual listening session on **Thursday, Feb. 5 at 12 p.m. EST** to solicit public input on the implementation of the FY 2026 Research Facilities Act Program (RFAP) Notice of Funding Opportunity. The RFAP program aims to assist land-grant Institutions with the construction, modification, acquisition, modernization, refurbishment, or remodeling of agricultural research facilities to conduct research in the food and agricultural sciences.

In reauthorizing the program last year, Congress increased its annual funding level to $125 million in mandatory spending. In addition to the listening session, **NIFA Program staff will also accept written comments before Feb. 12.** Visit the NIFA website for more information.

2/22-25/2026
2026 CARET/BAA Washington Conference
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities
Registration Required

The 2026 BAA/CARET Washington Conference will bring together delegates from the Council on Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching (CARET), members of the Administrative Heads Section (AHS), stakeholders from the Board on Agriculture Assembly (BAA), leaders from land-grant universities, and invited guests for a powerful convergence of advocacy, education, and networking. Over the course of the meeting, attendees will engage in a robust program featuring keynote addresses from food and agriculture thought-leaders, advocacy workshops, institutional and national-level business meetings, and Hill visits to connect directly with Members of Congress.

2026 NHA Annual Meeting & Humanities Advocacy Day
March 8-10, 2026
National Humanities Alliance
Registration Required

This event will provide an opportunity to connect with other humanities advocates from around the country. During the Annual Meeting, the National Humanities Alliance will explore approaches to year-round advocacy on college campuses and in local communities, while also preparing for visits to Capitol Hill. On Humanities Advocacy Day, participants meet with House and Senate offices to make a persuasive case for federal funding for the humanities.

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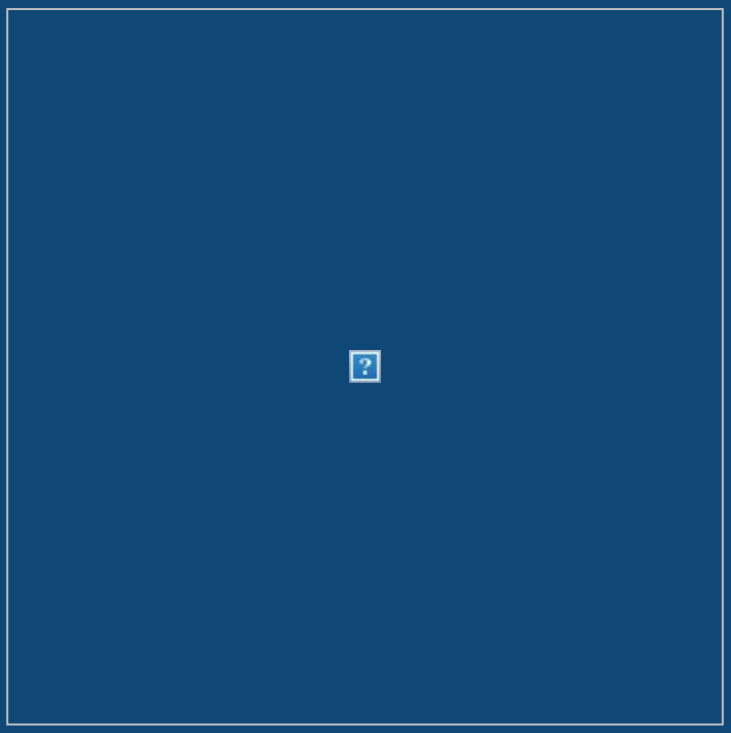

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